

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 14, 2018

Stephen H. Bryant
President and Chief Operating Officer
Columbia Gas of Massachusetts
4 Technology Drive
Westborough, MA 01581

Joseph Hamrock
President and Chief Executive Officer
NiSource
801 E. 86th Avenue
Merrillville, IN 46410

Dear Mr. Bryant and Mr. Hamrock,

We write regarding how your company handled its meters and regulation department and responded to staffing and resource concerns raised by qualified staff. Columbia Gas' former manager of the meters and regulation department, Bart Maderios, informed NBC10 Boston that he had requested more resources for the Greater Lawrence service area "multiple times" and that Columbia Gas cut down his department from four employees to one.¹ After working for Columbia Gas for 42 years, Mr. Maderios retired three months before the Merrimack Valley explosions occurred on September 13, 2018. As you know, this disaster resulted in devastation throughout the community—killing one, injuring dozens, and causing chaos in the lives of thousands of residents over the subsequent weeks and months.

The meters and regulation department is a critical component of the gas distribution operations, as it is responsible for monitoring gas pressure and maintaining a bird's-eye view of the entire pipeline system, including an awareness of ongoing construction projects and maintenance work. According to the interim National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) report, this department "had the maps containing control line information" but was not brought in to review the work order for the project that caused the September 13 disaster.²

In the interview, Mr. Maderios said, "When you deplete the resources, somebody's got to cut corners." From the NTSB report, it is clear that this is exactly what happened. Four years ago, Columbia Gas reversed its policy of having a technician on site at construction projects to monitor the pressure in gas distribution lines. If this policy had still been in effect, Columbia Gas

¹ Karen Hensel, "Whistleblower: Columbia Gas Cut Corners Prior to Explosions," NBC10 Boston (Dec. 11, 2018), <https://www.nbc10.com/investigations/Whistleblower-Columbia-Gas-Cut-Corners-Prior-to-Explosions-502505961.html>.

² "Natural Gas Distribution System Project Development and Review (Urgent)," National Transportation Safety Board (Nov. 15, 2018), <https://www.ntsb.gov/investigations/AccidentReports/Reports/PSR1802.pdf>.

personnel would have been able to shut down the gas as soon as the over-pressurization was detected, rather than taking 26 minutes to shut down the first regulator station.

According to Mr. Maderios, "In particular, in the Lawrence location the resources were minimal. They didn't have enough resources and I couldn't provide a technician to go babysit a construction job." Columbia Gas prioritized savings over safety and ignored clear concerns from experienced employees, and the people of Lawrence, Andover, and North Andover paid a devastating price as a result.

We ask for your responses to the following questions by Monday, December 17:

1. Which Columbia Gas official or officials made the decision to cut the meters and regulation department staff from four employees to one?
 - a. Were either of you personally involved in that decision? If no, were you informed of this decision at any point before the accident? If not, why not?
2. Was cost a factor in this decision to cut meters and regulation staff? If not, please explain the justification for this decision.
3. What is the current staffing level of the meters and regulation departments for the Greater Lawrence, Brockton, and Springfield operating areas?
4. Does Columbia Gas or NiSource have any staffing policies that dictate the appropriate number of meters and regulation employees per operating area? If so, do these policies take into account the number of people served, the age of the distribution system, and the miles of pipeline in the system? If not, why not?
5. Are Frank Davis and Dana Argo, to whom Mr. Maderios expressed his concerns, both still employees of Columbia Gas? What actions did they take, if any, in response to him raising these concerns?
6. Were either of you personally aware that Mr. Maderios had raised concerns over the lack of resources in the meters and regulation department and the potential that a disaster could occur as a result?

We are extremely concerned that Columbia Gas failed to heed Mr. Maderios' warnings that Columbia Gas' decisions to cut critical safety staff could lead to disaster. We look forward to your prompt response. Should you have any questions, please contact Morgan Gray in Sen. Markey's office at 202-224-2742.

Sincerely,


Edward J. Markey 
Edward J. Markey
United States Senator
Elizabeth Warren 
Elizabeth Warren
United States Senator